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VICTOR RIESSEL: INSIDE LABOR

LBJ Woos—and Wins—Labor

WASHINGTON: In a series of small, secret meetings with labor leaders and at White House dinners tendered to them, an amiable, handshaking, embracing, fraternal Lyndon Johnson has been going up his election machinery.

One of his off-the-record talks, for example, was with little known, but influential William C. Doherty, ambassador to Jamaica. This conversation was followed by an announcement from the White House on April 8 that the ambassador was resigning effective April 30. Doherty's resignation was scarcely noticed here—except by insiders who realized the importance of his move.

Johnson had personally telephoned and asked Doherty to come home and help him lobby on the Hill for the passage of a new bill which would grant considerable wage increases for civil service employees and for Congressmen.

Why did the President of the U.S. call for help from William C. Doherty, ambassador to a tiny island republic? Because Bill Doherty was president of the AFL-CIO National Assn. of Letter Carriers for over 21 years. During much of that time he was an AFL and later an AFL-CIO vice president. Over those years, he developed tremendous influence as a Congressional lobbyist.

And for decades one of his closest friends has been Lyndon Johnson. Together they put through many a law. Doherty was the first labor leader ever to hold a major diplomatic post. He was appointed by John Kennedy. But Mr. Johnson told Doherty he could be far more helpful to the White House in Washington—especially during the campaign year.

So Doherty resigned from his diplomatic post and has been lobbying quietly for the federal pay increase bill which was defeated earlier this year. Insiders are now betting it will pass. The labor lobby will put it over for Mr. Johnson.

There have been other recent secret sessions with union presidents—such as the meeting last week with New York State's Liberal Party leader, Alex Rose, who also heads the millinery union. They discussed New York State politics and the President now believes he can carry the state.

But the President is not neglecting politically important labor leaders who do not generally get into the White House. He's inviting them in by the score.

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Last Monday 50 national union presidents, whose headquarters are scattered across the country, received a communication from the White House. Mr. and Mrs. Lyndon Johnson were inviting the union leaders and their wives to dinner on May 4 at 7:30 p.m., black tie, etc.

But attached to the imposing formal invitation was the following note:

"At 7:30 preceding dinner, the President will discuss economic trends with the gentlemen and Mrs. Johnson will receive the ladies."

During such off-the-record bull sessions Mr. Johnson is at his best. He speaks more frankly about domestic and international affairs than has any other President. He goes about as far as any chief executive can without actually exposing Central Intelligence Agency secrets. This is doubly appreciated by the many union presidents who had never been invited to social evenings with the President in previous administrations, though they were always called on to pour money, manpower and car pools into local and national political campaigns.

Some of these labor chiefs didn't even get to the White House during the past decades unless there was a crisis. Typical of those who are now receiving Mr. Johnson's personal attention is Charles Luna, easily the most dominant personality amongst the leaders of railway unions. Luna, president of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen (the biggest in the field) told me the other day that "more attention has been paid to him and his colleagues on a personal basis in the past four days than in the past four decades."

When the rail crisis broke a few weeks ago, Luna was in Winnipeg, Canada. The President learned of this and dispatched a small jet to fly him to Washington. Luna was mighty pleased. Mr. Johnson, of course, wants to establish railroad peace in our time, but his own experience in Congress has taught him what few outsiders know—the political power of the railroad brotherhoods and their ability to whip up votes.

These are just a few moments in the recent life of Lyndon Johnson, political leader. There have been many others.

Make no mistake. Mr. Johnson has the labor chiefs with him solidly this early in the campaign.

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